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Navy Corpsman's 'New Normal': Part 1

Filed under [Communication](#), [Corpsman](#), [Fleet and the Fleet Marine Force](#) {[no comments](#)}

By Steve Van Der Werff, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery public affairs



Gilley on his motorcycle “Marion”.

Editor’s Note: Before 1990 people with disabilities could be discriminated against without legal consequences. That isn’t the case today. Today we honor the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act when our country committed itself to abolishing judgement against people undermined by injury or disease, clearing the way for people with disabilities to be allowed the same opportunities to form families, become parents and raise their children without interference based on outdated labels and incorrect expectations about their capacity to fully function as members of society. Today we also take pause to focus on Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Shane Gilley, a disabled Sailor assigned to Navy Operational Support Center Minneapolis, who continuously displays his resiliency and recently represented ‘Team Navy’ at the 2016 Department of Defense Wounded Warrior Games.

Many of us take for granted our physical ability to live what we presume to be a ‘normal life’ – walking upright, having full use of our hands and arms, traveling across the globe, excelling at work or school – completely mobile and without pain.

However, that isn’t the case for more than 60 million across the nation. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 19 percent of the U.S. population had a disability in 2010, with more than half of them reporting a severe disability.



In Afghanistan with Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC), preparing to patrol a village.

Before becoming disabled, 18-year Navy veteran Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Shane Gilley, from Minnetonka, Minnesota, categorized himself as having a ‘normal life’, a physically fit independent duty corpsman, who spent 14 out of 18 years with the Fleet Marine Force, ready to deploy and do what he was trained to do – take care of Sailors and Marines on the battlefield and off.

That was before his ‘new normal’ – being incapacitated. On a fateful day in April 2015, the avid motorcycle enthusiast, while riding his motorcycle, slammed into a car in front of him when the driver unexpectedly slammed on their brakes.

“If it wasn’t for my helmet I wouldn’t be here to tell my story,” said Gilley.

Fast forward – Gilley is severely injured. He requires five plates and twenty-two screws to fix a tibial plateau fracture that affects his knee joint, stability and motion. From April to July 2015 he lay still in a hospital bed, which challenged his willpower.

For Gilley becoming a patient was hard to swallow. After the accident occurred, while lying on the pavement, he was fully aware of the damage long before the ambulance arrived. At the hospital he was all too familiar with the tests and scans being ordered. “I knew what they were for, being told things like – hopefully, maybe or we don’t know right now made me want to scream because I have used those words of comfort myself.”

Today Gilley lives in constant pain. Things he took for granted like walking, standing up and just standing, now cause him a great deal of hurt and discomfort.

“Nothing is more annoying than just getting out bed in the morning and falling down because I forgot my knee is weak. My kids are great because they are constantly harassing me by saying ‘hurry up old man’ and then slowing down so I can catch up to them,” Gilley said. “I will never fully recover from this. There are going to be more surgeries down the road and maybe even the possibility of an above the knee amputation.”

For now Gilley receives physical therapy twice a week while continuing to regain his strength. His injuries don’t stop him from doing what he wants to do most of the time. However, maybe at a slower pace and with some modified rules and equipment in place.

“A lot of people would say I’m intense because I’ve seen and lost a lot through my career,” Gilley said. “But just because my body and my mind might be a little broken it doesn’t mean that my spirit to live my ‘new normal’ doesn’t mean my life is ruined.”

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Navy Corpsman's 'New Normal': Part 2

Filed under [Corpsman](#), [FEATURES](#), [Health](#) {[no comments](#)}



A hospital corpsman treats a child while deployed overseas.

By Steve Van Der Werff, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery public affairs

Editor's note: We continue our story about Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Shane Gilley's early childhood development prior to his military service. Disabled after being involved in a motorcycle accident, Gilley continuously displays his resiliency. He recently represented 'Team Navy' at the 2016 Department of Defense Wounded Warrior Games.

When Shane's parents divorced he moved with his mother and older sister to live with his maternal grandmother in Minnetonka, Minnesota.



Downtown Minnetonka, Minnesota

He lived in a great neighborhood filled with kids his age and had a dog named White Sox. He and his best friend Billy rode bikes, built forts, and swam in his grandmother's pool.

"We played war out in the woods. We were always some elite special – forces team patrolling in the woods looking for the enemy," said Gilley.

Gilley's mother and grandmother greatly influenced his life.

"One of my grandma's greatest qualities was her smile. It was a smile that could turn your darkest days bright and you couldn't help but smile and laugh back. I knew no matter what happened she would take care of us," Gilley said.

According to Gilley his mother is a rock.

“My mom was a single mother raising two children, but always found a way to make things work.”

After graduating high school, Shane worked long hours as an ambulance driver. When he turned 18 he bought his first motorcycle, much to the dismay of his mother and sister.

“My mom and sister said I was stupid for wanting to ride motorcycles, but they knew I was going to do what I wanted to do,” Gilley said.



Corpsmen take care of a wounded Marine during WWII.

When he turned 21, he recalled his numerous conversations with his grandfather, father and uncle proudly boasting about their Navy and Marine Corps service. With that in mind, he decided he wanted to take care of Marines on the battlefield. When he found out Marines are cared for by Navy Medicine personnel he enlisted in the Navy. He subsequently became Fleet Marine Force-qualified and an independent duty corpsman with numerous deployments in harm's way.

As much as Gilley praises his mother and grandmother for their guidance, wisdom and approach to life, it is his sister who has always been by his side, especially after his life changing accident. Each day during his initial recovery, his sister would tell him to get up and sit outside while she worked in the garden. Her children would ask him to sit at the table and eat with them. It made him feel wanted and not a burden. It made him push to fight harder.

“She and her family took care of me, and at the same time pushed me towards reclaiming my life.”

Time spent with his sister was beneficial because she was always fun to be with and knew how to make him laugh.

“I am a very sarcastic person, but I’m a bench warmer compared to her sarcasm,” he said.

When Gilley enlisted in the Navy he did so without his family knowing of his plans.

“After I graduated boot camp they said it looked like it was going to be a good fit for me.”

Stay tuned to find out more about Gilley's career in the Navy and how a discussion with a Navy Wounded Warrior – Safe Harbor representative led to him getting involved in adaptive sports.

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Navy Corpsman's 'New Normal': Part 3

Filed under [Corpsman](#), [FEATURES](#), [Health](#) {[no comments](#)}



Gilley in Afghanistan with Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC) , preparing to patrol a village.

By Steve Van Der Werff, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery public affairs

Editor's note: We continue our story about disabled Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Shane Gilley's career as a hospital corpsman taking care of Marines on the battlefield. Recently injured after being involved in a motorcycle accident, Gilley continuously displays his resiliency.

According to Gilley, he fell in love with math because it had a place outside of the classroom and could be applied to everyday life.

“My favorite teacher was Mr. Z. He taught applied math and really opened my eyes to how math truly relates to everyday life.”

When he arrived at basic training (boot camp), Gilley knew he had made the right choice to enlist. He especially appreciated how he was challenged to do his best, and how the rules, regulations and lessons-learned made sense, much like his beloved math.

His favorite recruit division commander was tough, but fair. His training method could often result in a harsh lesson to do better.

“During boot camp, you get a small glimpse into what the Navy is like. I gained a lot of experience there, said Gilley.”



Gilley's first deployment with battalion landing team in Republic of Kosovo.

When he graduated boot camp, Gilley was fully transformed. He was no longer a civilian, but now a full-fledged, card carrying member of the armed services, proudly wearing the cloth of our nation, much like his grandfather, father and uncle had done so before.

His indoctrination as a boot corpsman responding to real-world situations came quickly. His first duty station was Camp Lejeune, North Carolina as a weapons platoon corpsman for Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines – 8th Marine Regiment. During his stretch with Lima Company, he deployed twice to hostile environments.

“After my first deployment, I became Lima Company's senior corpsman, and after my second deployment I transferred into the battalion aid station.”

He was accepted into an advanced school to learn how the Marines operate, which gave him the skills and knowledge to qualify for his Fleet Marine Force (FMF) device, which he wears proudly on his uniform. Since he liked the medicine side of being a corpsman, he applied for and was selected for a very competitive program to become an independent duty corpsman.

“I wanted to be that person that was able to treat patients and didn't necessarily need a doctor around to do it.”

During deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, Gilley often went beyond the relative safety “outside the wire” of his unit's operating base to patrol unfriendly areas with his Marine brothers, always in a constant state of alert and scanning the area for threats. There were many times he was in danger, but with his training and the Marines around him, he always felt safe.

“It's actually an adrenaline rush because you never know what you may encounter,” Gilley said. “Being called ‘Doc’ by the Marines I have served with gives me a great deal of pride, and when you rush up to an injured Marine and the first thing they say is ‘I'm glad it's you,’ it validates all the training hours you put it in.”



Corpsmen learn how to operate with Marines at Field Medical Training Battalion – East or West.

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When the danger was real, Shane would put down his weapon and rush off to treat an injured Marine or Sailor.

“I have treated many Marines and Sailors on the battlefield from simple blisters to multisystem trauma. It hurt when I saw them get injured, but I knew I couldn’t break down because they needed me. It’s hard treating someone you know.”

Stay tuned to find out more, about how Gilley’s life was changed after his accident, by getting involved in adaptive sports and proudly representing the world’s greatest Navy during the 2016 DoD Warrior Games.

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Navy Corpsman's 'New Normal': Part 4 – Final Chapter

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Gilley gets in some sitting volleyball practice before a match at the 2016 Department of Defense Wounded Warrior Games.

By Steve Van Der Werff, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery public affairs

Editor's note: We conclude our series about disabled Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Shane Gilley, who exemplifies the warrior spirit and resiliency of our brother's in arms. He has overcome his own personal adversity to become a shining example to those living with a disability.

Every time Gilley deployed with the Marines half way across the globe, he lived in extremely austere living conditions, facing multiple dangers – extreme heat, mortar attacks, snipers and improvised explosive devices. Remarkably, he returned home each time unscathed. An avid motorcycle enthusiast his entire adult life, whenever Gilley returned to the States, he couldn't wait to hop on his bike "Marion" to answer the call of the open road. He enjoyed the road rules and camaraderie with fellow riders.

While on a well-deserved vacation, Gilley's former life came to an end and his new normal, living with a disability, began when he violently slammed into a vehicle.

After months of recovery, numerous surgeries and physical therapy, Gilley, unapologetically felt worn out and beaten.



Gilley was used to living an incredibly active lifestyle.

“I had a broken left thumb and my shin bone was shattered. I couldn’t walk. I needed help showering. I needed help going to the bathroom. If I went anywhere, I was in my wheelchair with my leg sticking straight out. I couldn’t do the basics. I felt hopeless,” Gilley said. “There were times when I wished I hadn’t lived through the accident, but in the end, with the support of my family, I’m glad I’m still here.”

Gilley was used to living an incredibly active lifestyle, but after the accident physical therapy was his only activity. His spirits were lifted when Navy Wounded Warrior – Safe Harbor asked if he’d like to attend an adaptive sports camp in California.

Competing in adaptive sports removed Gilley’s idea of what he couldn’t do. It gave him the strength and courage to believe he can accomplish any goal he sets his sight on. Soon after, he tried out for “Team Navy” to compete in the 2016 DoD Warrior Games.



Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Shane Gilley, left, and a British competitor bond at the 2016 Department of Defense Wounded Warrior Games.

“Competing in the games gave me a new drive to improve myself. It changed my thoughts from ‘I can’t’ to ‘why can’t I?’ The intra-service rivalry is still part of the games, but the competitors are amazing. You cheer for everyone because you know what it takes to compete at that level,” said Gilley. “When I showed my family what sitting volleyball and air pistol was all about they were amazed and supportive. They appreciate the positive changes adaptive sports have made to my mental well-being.”

The 2017 Warrior Games in Chicago are just around the corner and Gilley has already started his workout program to compete. He hopes to add wheelchair basketball and some field events to his arsenal.

“I walked away from this year’s games with a huge sense of self pride. Even though I didn’t earn a medal, I gave it everything I had. I now have something to look forward to next year,” said Gilley. “I want to show my children if you keep working hard you can achieve your goals no matter what stands in your way.”

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